

**July 29, 2002**

**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER**

**PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION OF MEDICAL CENTER DIRECTORS,  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS, CHIEFS OF STAFF AND KEY HEADQUARTERS STAFF**

1. As one of its key strategic objectives, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has committed itself to enhancement and system-wide standardization of the quality of care it provides.
2. To assist in improving processes and outcomes, and to objectively demonstrate the quality of VHA facilities, programs, and staffs, VHA participates in a broad array of external accrediting programs. Illustrative of these are the accreditation programs of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission; American College of Surgery, American College of Radiology, American Association of Blood Banks, College of American Pathologists, and Nuclear Regulatory Commission.
3. VHA adheres to exacting educational requirements for other professional staff. For example, psychologists must hold a doctorate degree; social workers must be prepared at the Master of Social Work level; and all dietitians must be registered with the American Dietetics Association. Many other allied and/or associate health professions personnel are required to pass comprehensive examinations in their disciplines in order to practice, and they must demonstrate continuing education in the field to maintain current licensure.
4. It is essential that individuals who are selected to serve in VHA executive leadership positions (e.g., Network Directors, Deputy Network Directors, and Clinical Services Managers; Veterans Integrated Service network (VISN) Service Line Coordinators or Directors; medical center Directors or Managers; Deputy Directors, Associate Directors, and/or Assistant Directors; Chiefs of Staff; Associate Chiefs of Staff and Key Central Office Staff) be subject to the same type of requirements as clinical care personnel. Through their participation in professional accrediting bodies, management can overtly and objectively demonstrate the possession of basic knowledge and skills needed to provide effective leadership to our facilities and programs, as well as demonstrate their commitment to on-going professional development to improve one's ability to manage in a rapidly changing and highly competitive environment.
5. Therefore, the VHA National Leadership Board's Executive Resources Board (ERB), the Network Directors, and those Executive Leadership Councils, or other groups designated as "search committees," strongly consider the possession of an appropriate professional certification as one of the distinguishing factors for selection into one of VHA's key administrative roles. The Office of the Under Secretary considers this participation and certification in recommending appointment of nominees by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

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6. In evaluating the weight and relevance of the professional certification or affiliation, VHA places greater emphasis on those bodies which admit or advance candidates based on a structured process of education, experience, examination and continuing professional development, as opposed to bodies which offer simple enrollment or membership based on payment of dues or employment in the healthcare field. The programs administered by the American College of Healthcare Executives and the American College of Physician Executives are representative of those which demonstrate commitment to personal and professional development. Other organizations which provide members with training, education, and professional development can be considered as well.

7. Individuals interested in being considered for selection to VHA executive leadership positions are strongly encouraged to initiate participation in these accrediting bodies at their earliest convenience, if they have not already done so.

S/ Nevin M. Weaver fo  
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Under Secretary for Health

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